




Speech By  
**Christopher Whiting**

**MEMBER FOR BANCROFT**

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**APPROPRIATION (COVID-19) BILL**

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (4.05 pm): I rise to speak in support of the COVID-19 appropriation bill that we have before us. Before I start, I want to touch on some of the comments from the shadow Treasurer who spoke earlier before, applauding the federal government for their \$200 billion, I think it was, support for the Australian economy, and applauding New South Wales for \$10,000 grants to local businesses. I would like to formally welcome the shadow Treasurer to the ranks of Keynesian economics supporters across Australia. It reminds me of that time in 1908 when Andrew Fisher said, 'We are all Socialists now.' Apparently, we are all Keynesian economics supporters now.

**Ms Trad:** From the federal government, right down to councils.

**Mr WHITING:** Yes, all of them. They are all joining the ranks, yes. I give the shadow Treasurer this advice: you cannot sing the praises of Keynesian economics if you want to let the market devour Virgin Airlines. As the Minister for State Development has said, the LNP, with this, are throwing 5,000 Queensland Virgin workers onto the scrap heap with their lack of support for them. As he pointed out, they would have been happy to spend \$100 million preparing Queensland assets for sale to foreign owners, but at the same time they will rail against the foreign owners of this particular airline. My advice is if you want to become a Keynesian economics supporter, please strive for some consistency.

What is very clear is that this bill will support the ordinary working Queenslanders who are feeling the impact of the COVID-19 emergency, that is the people in Queensland who have lost their jobs, have lost their income or are at risk of losing their tenancies.

We are delivering a \$400 billion COVID-19 funding package. As part of that package, the Palaszczuk government is committing an additional \$1.2 billion to the health budget to expand capacity in our public hospitals and to utilise and access that capacity in our private hospitals. Another part of that package is pumping \$2.5 billion into protecting Queensland jobs and Queensland businesses. As the member for Logan said before, this is making the jobs, the hospitals and the schools in all our communities safe.

As the Treasurer said earlier today, we have already put nearly half a billion dollars into the accounts of Queenslanders and Queensland small businesses. I commend her on the tremendous work that she and all of her cabinet colleagues have done in getting this money into the pockets of Queenslanders. That means our package is already saving the livelihoods of many Queenslanders. I will mention a few of the features of this package. I will mention how these measures are alleviating the stress and strain that many extraordinary working Queenslanders are now feeling.

For those Queenslanders who have lost their jobs during the COVID-19 emergency, we have the \$500 million worker assistance package. Through that, they can now access free online training in TAFE courses. They can access a new online portal that will match them to Queensland jobs. A key focus of this portal will be matching them with the new jobs that are being created as part of the areas of critical service delivery. Some of those industries we are talking about with job opportunities include agriculture, call centres, food production, logistics and manufacturing.

We also heard today that 1,390 Queensland businesses have now received concessional loans, interest free for a year, as part of this package. Those loans have supported up to 19,000 jobs. That adds up to over 20,000 Queensland families who have received a lifeline through this program. We know that every Queensland household will have \$200 taken off their electricity bill thanks to this package. Queensland's sole traders and small and medium businesses will receive a \$500 rebate on their electricity bills this year. This is very welcome indeed.

Another feature I want to point out is that 465 Queensland community kindergartens have also received a lifeline. These are kindies overseen by committees of volunteers and parents—parents who do working bees to maintain their kindies. I speak of kindies like the Burpengary C&K where my four-year-old, Arabella, is being educated. This lifeline has come about through a \$70 million support package to keep community kindergartens going. It helps them stay open in term 2. It helps provide their programs free of charge to families during this period. It means 22,000 young Queenslanders can enjoy a free kindergarten program and even take up learning at home. Importantly, 2,754 early childhood teachers and educators in Queensland will continue to be employed.

For those Queenslanders struggling with mental health, alcohol or other drug problems during the COVID-19 emergency, the Palaszczuk Labor government has a \$28 million fund for groups or non-government organisations that are providing health care for vulnerable Queenslanders. Those who are amongst the most vulnerable Queenslanders are also being taken care of as part of this \$4 billion package.

In conclusion, I point out once again that Queensland is leading the way in combatting this virus. We heard from the Minister for Small Business this morning that we led the way. We were first out of the blocks with our \$27 million package. Queensland activated the State Health Emergency Coordination Centre on 29 January, barely three weeks after the first patients were diagnosed in Wuhan. We were the first Australian state to move. I commend the Minister for Health for the tremendous job he has done. He acted very quickly and purchased an additional 110 ventilators and \$25 million worth of medicines, gloves and masks. We showed we knew what was coming. We prepared early and in a solid and comprehensive way.

I think this bill shows why more than ever this state needs a Labor government. We have shown that only Labor will look after the jobs, the schools and the hospitals that mean so much to extraordinary working Queenslanders. I commend the bill to the House.